

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08
INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05 /102 W
-----069922 171624Z /45

R 161622Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 023
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 1221

PARIS AND BRUSSELS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, TS
SUBJ: DISCUSSIONS WITH INTERIM UGTT LEADERSHIP

1. SUMMARY. EMBOFFS MET WEDNESDAY, FEB 16, WITH TIJANI ABID, SECRETARY GENERAL AD INTERIM UGTT, ISMAEL LEJRI, A DEPUTY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ACTING AS ABID'S ADVISOR, AND MR. FINISHE, POSITION UNKNOWN. ABID AND COMPANY STATED THAT IT PLANNED SOON TO PETITION FOR

RELEASE OF ARRESTED UGTT MEMBERS, INCLUDING ACHOUR, AND TO DEFEND THEM IF BROUGHT TO TRIAL. THEY OUTLINED PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING UGTT NATIONAL CONGRESS. ABID DISCUSSED EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE JAN 26 GENERAL STRIKE, THE NATURE OF INFLUENCES CAUSING THE STRIKE DECISION, AND THE POLITICAL FALLOUT
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EMANATING FROM IT. END SUMMARY.

2. ABID EMPHASIZED NATIONAL CONGRESS FEB 25-26 WOULD TAKE PLACE IN DEMOCRATIC MANNER AND ACCORDING TO STRICT LETTER OF UGTT STATUTE. HE SAID ALL DELEGATES (ABOUT 450 INNUMBER) WOULD BE ELECTED OUT OF LOCAL UNIONS PROPORTIONAL TO MEMBERSHIP. THEY STRESSED CONGRESS WOULD BE OPEN TO ALL UNION

MEMBERS AS WELL AS DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS. UGTT HAD NOT YET RECEIVED REPLIES FROM INTERNATIONAL LABOR BODIES INVITED TO SEND OBSERVERS, WITH EXCEPTION OF ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN TRADE UNION UNITY. HIGHEST ECONOMIC PRIORITY, AFTER SETTTLING POLITICAL LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS, WILL BE TO PREPARE FOR WAGE LEVEL AND COST-OF-LIVING RENEGOTIATION IN APRIL 1978 UNDER TERMS OF SOCIAL PACT. THIS PERIOD, ABID SAID, WOULD CONSTITUTE FIRST MAJOR TEST OF NEW LEADERSHIP.

3. ABID AND ADVISERS SPECULATED FREELY ON POLITICAL MATTERS. ABID CLAIMED HE HAD ADVISED ACHOUR AGAINST RESIGNING FROM PSD POLITICAL BUREAU ON GROUNDS "THERE MUST BE RELATIONSHIP AND MUTUAL SUPPORT BETWEEN UNION AND SOME POLITICAL PARTY." THEN, AS NOW, ONLY POSSIBLE PARTY WAS PSD. ABID DID NOT DISCOUNT NEED TO FORM NEW LABOR PARTY EVENTUALLY, BUT HE SAID THIS IS NOT AN IMMEDIATE GOAL AND COULD OCCUR ONLY AFTER ADEQUATE PLANNING AND PREPARATION. ASKED ABOUT REINTEGRATION OF FORMER UGTT MEMBERS AND OFFICERS WHO HAD RESIGNED TO PROTEST FORMER BOARD'S POLICIES, ABID FELT MOST WOULD REJOIN, GIVEN THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES. HE SHOWED LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP OF FORCE OUVRIERE TUNISIENNE (RECENTLY FORMED PARALLEL UNION WHICH HAS NEVER REALLY GOTTEN OFF GROUND) ASKING THAT FOT MEMBERSHIP BE READMITTED INTO UGTT.

4. FURTHER TO ACHOUR SITUATION, ABID SAID HE AND 40 OTHERS STILL DETAINED FOR QUESTIONING, PROBABLY WILL FACE CRIMINAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CHARGES, ALTHOUGH UGTT CONGRESS WILL BE ASKED TO PASS RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THEIR RELEASE. IF THEY ARE BROUGHT TO TRIAL, UGTT WILL TAKE PART IN THEIR LEGAL DEFENSE. RESPONDING TO QUESTION OF EXPULSION OF ACHOUR GROUP FROM UGTT, ABID SAID DECISION WOULD DEPEND ON EVIDENCE NOW BEING DEVELOPED BY POLICE INVESTIGATION. IN NO CASE WOULD EXPULSIONS OCCUR BEFORE FEB 25 CONGRESS. ABID SAID 450 UGTT MEMBERS NATIONWIDE, WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED DURING AND AFTER GENERAL STRIKE, ALREADY HAD BEEN RELEASED BECAUSE OF DIRECT UGTT INTERVENTION WITH AUTHORITIES. ABID SAID THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY TRIED TO DISUADE ACHOUR FROM CALLING GENERAL STRIKE ON GROUNDS THAT ITS PURPOSES WERE POLITICAL RATHER THAN ECONOMIC.

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PARIS AND BRUSSELS FOR LABATT

FURTHERMORE, HE SAID, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ORGANIZE
A GENERAL STRIKE IN TWO DAYS. ABID SAID ALTHOUGH NO PROOF
OF DIRECT LIBYAN INVOLVEMENT IN
EVENTS OF JAN 26 HAD BEEN
UNEARTHED, HE WAS CERTAIN THAT SOME ACHOUR-LIBYA CONNECTION
EXISTED IN FORM OF "MONEY AND TECHNICAL AID." ABID SAID THAT
NO COPY OF DEC 25 UGTT-LIBYAN LABOR FEDERATION JOINT COMMUNIQUE
EXISTED IN TUNIS UGTT HEADQUARTERS FILES, NOR HAD IT EVER
BEEN PRESENTED TO EXECUTIVE BUREAU FOR REVIEW OR APPROVAL.
HE STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT ALL PLANS TO OPEN UGTT BRANCHES
IN LIBYA AND FRANCE TO SERVICE EXPATRIATE TUNISIAN WORKERS HAD
BEEN SCUTTLED, "BECAUSE THEY ARE ILLEGAL." ABID ALSO MAIN-
TAINED THAT BAATHIST AND COMMUNIST INFLUENCES WITHIN EXECUTIVE
BUREAU INCREASED DURING PERIOD OF ACHOUR'S LEADERSHIP.

5. ATMOSPHERICS OF THIS MEETING WERE POSITIVE. LONG LINE
OF SUPPLICANTS WAITING TO SEE LEADERSHIP, CONSTANT TELEPHONE
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INTERRUPTIONS, EXECUTIVE OFFICE AND APPURTENANCES COMPLETELY
UNDISTURBED EITHER BY POLICE INVESTIGATORS OR BY NEW OCCUPANTS,
REMINDED EMBOFFS OF TYPICAL, BUSINESS-AS-USUAL UGTT DAY.
ABID SAID HE WELCOMED CALL BY EMBASSY OFFICERS AND AGREED TO
FACILITATE FUTURE CONTACTS WITH FEDERATION AND REGIONAL
LEADERSHIP AFTER FEB 25 CONGRESS. ABID AND ADVISORS AGREED NOT
TO PUBLICIZE VISIT TO AVOID APPEARANCE OF USG ENDORSEMENT.
THEY VOLUNTEERED THAT UGTT DELEGATION WAS IN PARIS TO SEE
IRVING BROWN, AFL-CIO INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, AT APPROXI-

MATELY SAME TIME AS OUR VISIT. BECAUSE OF DELICACY OF SITUATION,
THIS APPOINTMENT LIKEWISE WILL REMAIN UNPUBLICIZED, ABID SAID.
MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NEGOTIATIONS, PRISONERS RELEASE, LABOR UNION OFFICIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978TUNIS01221
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780074-0162
Format: TEL
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780244/aaaablmz.tel
Line Count: 173
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ad6647d5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3568317
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DISCUSSIONS WITH INTERIM UGTT LEADERSHIP
TAGS: ELAB, TS, (ACHOUR, HABIB)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ad6647d5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014